

"Time to submit my resignation."

"Why is that?" Doc looked up from his chicken salad sandwich to see his department chairman joining him. With Jonas you first saw the bushy brows, then tufts of white hair in his ears.

"I spotted your name on a brochure for Advanced Double Transformational Psychiatry or some such hyper-academic horseshit. And I promised when the fifth startling new approach came along, I'd get out. Five is the complete cycle in a plodding career. When I came to this combative University of Pennsylvania, I fought in the avant-garde of another startling development, the name of which I've forgotten. Anyway, a different time then!

We all had brews after--even the vanquished. All of us making

such witty jokes as *Get off the table, Mabel, that money's for the beer!*

"Anyway, everyone should be asked once a year: Are you finished? I really don't have to count to any number to know I am. Oh I can still be the head clerk around here till retirement, but unfortunately I wouldn't know a truly original idea if it bit me in the ass. Young people have ideas. They don't know any better."

"Whatever," Doc sighed, "I'm just there for the luncheon panel at Windows On the World. Why make a big deal of it? Can I get you a beer? Hemlock?"

"September eleventh, two thousand and one! A day which will live in scholarship. Or infamy. Whatever. Eighty-five plus floors up or so! Brought high to be struck down." He smugly crossed his arms in front of a sticky coffee mug left by someone.

"How's that?"

"Why do you think you were invited?" One brow flared.

"I have no idea. I can hardly say double trans..." Doc twirled a toothpick with a tiny shredded skirt.

"Straw man. To represent old thinking, ripe for dismemberment by the young Turks. Sorry."

"I guess it had to come to that." Doc laughed. "You stick around and soon you're one of the old guys. But they'll be disappointed. I'm about what might work with patients. Not big ideas or Chinese boxes of abstractions!"

"Patients? They'll consider that a hideously dated notion. And those Chinese boxes you shun are breathtaking; whereas, clinical details? Beneath contempt! Pissing, shitting, haunted people! How can you make that pretty? And it has to be pretty before it's abstract. And then it's beautiful! Having absolutely nothing to do with anything!"

"Well, excuse me! But, at least somewhere in there, that's putting the cart before the horse."

"Say that! They'll love that! 'Now that is just what we're doing, DOCTOR!' a whiz-kid'll shout, and applause will sweep that room so so far up in the gritty, toxic New York clouds. Appropriately enough, for such airy and poisonous assholes. Maybe a hundred windows up! I'm vague on that. Have to check the Triple A guidebook!"

"I think, as always, Jonas, you have too many stories. Anyway, what do you want me to do, not go?" Doc placed the toothpick on his napkin.

"Oh you'll have a great time. It's actually fun. It is

ideas, after all."

"White man speak with forked tongue."

"Indeed I do. We do. It's like taking a wonderful bath!
In language! Anyway, you'll be cleansed mid the cumulous."

"Sounds like the Maxwell Parrish painting over my parents'
sofa."

"How is Stelly? I liked Stelly. I wish she hadn't left."

"Well, she had a cockeyed plan to become a captain
in Belize. Pitiful! Laughable! Delusional! And what do you know?
She's a captain in Belize. Licensed and everything."

"Do I say good for her?"

"Go right ahead! It made divorce and custody easier.
And she's trying to be a Mom again. She phones pretty much every
week, but I can't let her talk to Kippy just yet because
she's high. But she's getting better. She promised not to call
for another month, and then to be stone-cold clean when
she does."

"Do you believe her? That it's not just addict stuff?"
Concern registered on the ample, ruddy forehead.

"Yes I believe her this time. She'll do it. And when
Kippy's older she can spend vacations down there."

"Sometimes when I'm done understanding things in my

wonderful, comforting, academic way, I discover the slamming, tragic dimension to so much of life. A family ruined by drugs or am I being melodramatic?"

"Not enough."

"Give me that check!" Jonas snatched it with high drama from Rocco, the waiter. "Department picking up your chicken salad sandwich and whatever. Want a desert? I love having you around!--you have absolutely no academic ambition!"

"Anyway, consider it an award for a totally superb doctor, the real deal never fully recognized. Now don't laugh in embarrassment. I'm not drawing my long bow this one time."

"Simply the truth."

"My Mommy has a boat, a big boat!"

"Yes she does, but this is a train. Silver train. Silver is like one of your doll's little purses."

"Tricky Diddles?"

"Yes, Tricky Diddles: she drives the boy dolls crazy. Anyway, Sweetheart, the train is called Acela, and it goes into the biggest building in the whole world! And then it stops, and it goes straight up, way way up!"

"Like an L-vator."

"Yes, just like one."

"Daddy take me train go way way up!"

"Yes! I promise! But not this time. This time you'll stay here with Mrs Lowry. And you'll tell her your Daddy's story, and she'll correct it with the astringent truth—which is why we have the Mrs Lowrys of the world."

That next, very early morning, Doc left with his briefcase after kissing Kippy in her sleep-warmth. "Train way sky," she burbled in dreams.

He left the front door open, lamplight spilling onto the black lawn. When Mrs Lowry's cream Neon pulled in, he waved and started his walk to the station, escaping her to avoid confirming details for the third time.

"Don't worry!" she yelled, getting out of the car. "I've got the keys!" She thrust them up, dim gold, to convince him, though the front door stood wide open.